

Easter Island in the Photographic Archive of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition, 1955-56

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The Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific was an important milestone in Rapa Nui research. The expedition team directed by Thor Heyerdahl arrived to the island on 27th of October 1955 onboard the ship *Christian Bjelland*, and included William Mulloy, Arne Skjølsvold, Carlyle Smith, Edwin Ferdon and Gonzalo Figueroa. The expedition carried out large-scale excavations at Vinapu, 'Orongo, Rano Raraku, 'Anakena, Tepeu, Poike "ditch", and also investigated house foundations, walled enclosures, *hare moa* and caves around the island. After more than five months of intensive work, the expedition left Rapa Nui on 6th of April 1956, heading to other Polynesian islands to gather the data for comparative studies. Expedition reports were published in two large volumes, the first of which is completely dedicated to Easter Island (Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961).

The extensive photographic coverage of the expedition was performed by Erling Schjervén (Martinsson-Wallin 2006:88). The complete image archive now belongs to the collection of the Kon-Tiki Museum; it contains about 1400 color slides dedicated to Easter Island, arranged into slide sets #81-85, #90-99, #101-155, #263 (expedition ship images) and thirteen unnumbered sets mostly featuring pictures taken at Rano Raraku. Only about one fifth of these photos were published in the "*Archaeology of Easter Island*" and the books written by Thor Heyerdahl. A large number of Schjervén's pictures appeared in a new book by Helene Martinsson-Wallin, "*Rapa Nui: Aku-aku from Afar*". The book presents very interesting overview of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition, results of further research work at the island, and also identifies the names of Rapa Nui people and crew members appearing in the photos.

The importance of Schjervén's photographic gallery in particular consists in the large variety of the topics covered. The results of analysis concerning the distribution of the photos over various categories are summarized in Table 1. As one can see, the monolithic sculpture of Easter Island gets the major coverage with an emphasis on statue re-erection experiment (Ahu Ature Huki) and excavations of the unique images such as *Tukuturi* RR-030 (Skjølsvold 1961:360-362) and a pillar-like statue 02-209-09 (Mulloy 1961:133-135). The latter *moai* is a special case that requires a detailed discussion

The red scoria cremation pillar (modern survey number 02-209-09) was excavated by William Mulloy at Ahu Vinapu 2 (Mulloy 1961:133). This type of *moai* was historically documented by J. Linton Palmer, who visited the island in 1868: "*The finest (cremation pillar) I saw was at Winipoo ... In a paved area ... is a pillar of red tuff 3.5 feet*

Table 1. Distribution of photos over categories.

People and expedition life	280
Various individual and group photos	76
Portraits of Rapanui people	32
Easter islanders performing <i>kaikai</i>	15
Expedition ship and life onboard	22
Arrival of the Chilean ship <i>Pinto</i>	11
Reed boats: construction and testing	94
Diving, mainly at the paved boat ramps	10
Expedition camp at 'Anakena	20
Rapa Nui nature and landscapes	281
Sea views of Easter Island and the islets	30
Rano Kau, incl. walks over crater lake	32
Rano Raraku, Te Pu Makari, crater lake	94
Landscapes, sea and surf views	74
Sunrises and sunsets	27
Flora & fauna (incl. domestic animals)	24
Excavations	187
Orongo houses, Mata Ngarau, compl. A	20
Vinapu: two <i>ahu</i> and uphill village	47
Rano Raraku: excavated statues	63
Rano Raraku: hillocks and structures	16
Poike "ditch" excavations	18
Other excavations	23
Rock art and monolithic statues	311
Petroglyphs (excluding Mata Ngarau)	18
Ana Kai Tangata paintings	5
Statues at Rano Raraku quarries	215
<i>Moai Tukuturi</i> RR-030, Rano Raraku	21
Red scoria <i>moai</i> 02-209-09, Vinapu	12
Red scoria <i>moai</i> 08-998-01, Hangaroa	16
Miscellaneous <i>moai</i> around the island	24
Red scoria topknots	19
<i>Pukao</i> at Puna Pau quarries	12
Red scoria topknots around the island	7
Architectural structures	81
Ahu Tongariki before tsunami damage	12
Other <i>ahu</i> (Akahanga, Vaihu, etc.)	48
<i>Hare moa</i> , <i>tupa</i> , <i>manavai</i> , etc.	21
Experimental archaeology	104
<i>Moai</i> carving experiment, Rano Raraku	10
<i>Moai</i> transport experiment, Anakena	7
Statue re-erection, Ahu Ature Huki	87
Miscellaneous	122
Rapanui manuscripts B, C, D	51
Entrances and interiors of the caves	12
Cave stones and their manufacture	53
Unsorted images	6
Total number of the photos	1385



Figure 1. *Moai* 02-209-09, Ahu Vinapu 2: a) as-excavated (photo courtesy Kon-Tiki Museum) (it is shown vertically for comparison); b) modern view (photo by the author 2002).

squared and 8.5 or 8.75 feet high. The top projects, forwards, and ends in two horns, with a deep saddle shaped notch between them; each horn has a face traced on it, in low relief ... The projecting part is terminated at the breast, and lower down a round projecting navel is marked. Just above, where the pillars join the area, the fingers are sculptured, in low relief, flat, and clasping the hips as in the images" (cited in Mulloy 1961:134). The heads of the excavated specimen are missing, though other details fit the description very well, namely the pronounced breasts and unusually large navel, possibly implying pregnancy (Van Tilburg 1986:7). The statue lacks the loincloth design, featuring an indentation between the hands right where *hami* is usually placed. All these details suggest that this *moai* may represent a female (Van Tilburg 1986:7).

It is important to highlight the good agreement of statue height measurements: Palmer's values gravitate around 2.6m; the re-erected statue 02-209-09 measures 2.4m (Van Tilburg 1986:6), making it tempting to assume that it may be the very same image described by Palmer. Surprisingly, the height of the excavated *moai* reported by Mulloy is much larger – 3.5m (1961:133). The expedition photo-archives enable the latter controversy to be solved and also offer strong evidence that the *moai* in question indeed represents a female (Fig. 1a). As one can see, the image has a clearly-depicted *komari*, which became buried upon re-erection of the statue (Fig. 1b). As we know, prior to the excavations the front side of this *moai* was above the ground (Mulloy 1961: 133). Thus, it could be possible that

komari was carved over the toppled image, similar to that applied on a male *moai* of Ahu O'Pepe (Van Tilburg 1994: 142, Fig. 115). However, high hand position (Fig. 1a) suggests that the lower part of the statue was initially made larger to accommodate a *komari* carving. This hypothesis has strong confirmation in Palmer's account. Palmer saw the whole statue free-standing on a paved area and observed a carving at its base. However, instead of interpreting its meaning, he described it geometrically mentioning that the fingers of *moai* were carved "where the pillars join the area". Therefore, the *komari* bas-relief was already present on the standing statue, making it tempting to conclude that *moai* 02-209-09 was initially intended to represent a female, and also that Palmer described this statue.

Comparing the proportions between the main details of the statue (Fig. 1.a) with the modern measurements (Van Tilburg 1986:6), it is possible to confirm that the perspective distortions in Schjervén's photo are negligibly small. Thus, using the same scale, one can estimate that the excavated *moai* was about 2.9 meters tall. This figure satisfactory correlates with Palmer's data; moreover, in quick handwriting "2.9" may look similar to "3.5", thus offering a plausible explanation of the image height reported by Mulloy. The bas-relief *komari* design, extending above the hands of the *moai* (Fig.1.a), can be estimated to be up to 75 cm long, some 50 cm of which became buried when the statue was set in the vertical position. In my opinion, namely the rapid re-erection of *moai* 02-290-09, was the key factor making the presence of its *komari* design forsaken; the main photo representing this statue in the expedition reports was naturally chosen to depict a standing *moai* seen from the front (Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961: plate 14). Thus, to avoid repetition, the excavated image was illustrated with a profile photo (ibid., plate 13d), which does not allow clear detection of *komari* design. The map of the excavated site (Mulloy 1961: Fig. 133) was most probably drawn after the preparation of the report and selection of the photos for the publication because the excavated statue 02-209-09 is shown to be 3.5 m tall and lacks any traces of a *komari* symbol.

Photographic archives of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition also contain important data concerning *moai* excavations, mainly at Rano Raraku quarries. Comparing the recent photos with those taken in 1955-56, one can detect the parts of the statues that were excavated and left exposed to the action of the elements, resulting in surface weathering and rock color change, as well as appearance and growth of lichens. This information is very important for the development of the efficient techniques preventing rapid erosion of the statues and also for testing new methods that may be potentially able to estimate the age of the monuments. Expedition reports mention the following Rano Raraku statues as uncovered after excavations: *moai Tuku-turi* RR-030 (its face was exposed above the surface before the excavations, see Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961: plates 50a, 52a, Skjølsvold 1989:6), *moai* RR-049 with boat petroglyph on its chest and the neighboring statue RR-050. Parts



Figure 2. Schematic diagram of Rano Raraku excavations performed in 1962 (after Mazière 1970:73) and suggested identification of their locations (photo by P. Horley, 2002).

of several other statues (e.g. RR-061, RR-093, RR-265) also remained exposed after the excavation.

However, the analysis of Schjervén's photos allows positive identification of the further excavation work in Rano Raraku, performed by Francis Mazière in 1962. Mazière's book presents only brief descriptions of excavation activities and a rough sketch of their locations (Fig. 2). The hints in the text suggest that "cleaning a ladder of four statues arranged according to their completion" (Mazière 1970: 81) refers to the easternmost excavation (Fig. 2.1) with a "stacked quarry" formed by *moai* RR-A-018 – RR-A-021. The next "largest excavations ... extending for 70 meters" corresponds to the neighboring image clusters situated at the western upper quarries (Fig. 2.3), where Mazière cleaned a shoulder of the "wonderful bearded statue carved with its head down the slope" (1970:82) from the debris, which positively identifies it with *moai* RR-A-094 (already almost completely exposed in 1955-56, see Heyerdahl and Ferdon 1961, plate 55a).

Further work at the same excavation uncovered "the largest statue 10.5 meters high ... around which there was a pile of other images." Mazière also mentions a two-meter tall *moai* lying at the forehead of the giant (1970:82). This description makes a clear reference to the statue RR-A-107 (9.92m tall according to Shepardson, 2007) surrounded by various *moai* including small image RR-A-106 situated at its forehead, just as described by Mazière (Fig. 3a, b)

As it can be seen from Schjervén's photo (Figure 3a), these statues were only partially exposed in 1955-56, while nowadays they are completely above the ground (Figure 3b). Further, Mazière also excavated here an "intact wonder, lying supine on a stone couch ... This giant with the color of white ochre appeared before us in all its primeval beauty" (1970:82-83), which perfectly describes *moai* RR-A-108 (Figure 3c). Surprisingly, its color is still much lighter in comparison with the surrounding statues, including the lower part of the image RR-A-109 that was excavated at the same time. The ochre-colored *moai* also features unusual rounded protuberances at the centers of its nose wings (Figure 3d).

Further excavations were carried out by Mazière in a "large trench 20 meters wide and 60 meters long. In this trench, made by human hands, we also had to work much. We have to free two beautiful 10 meter tall sculptures from the layer of soil and debris." (Mazière 1970:81).

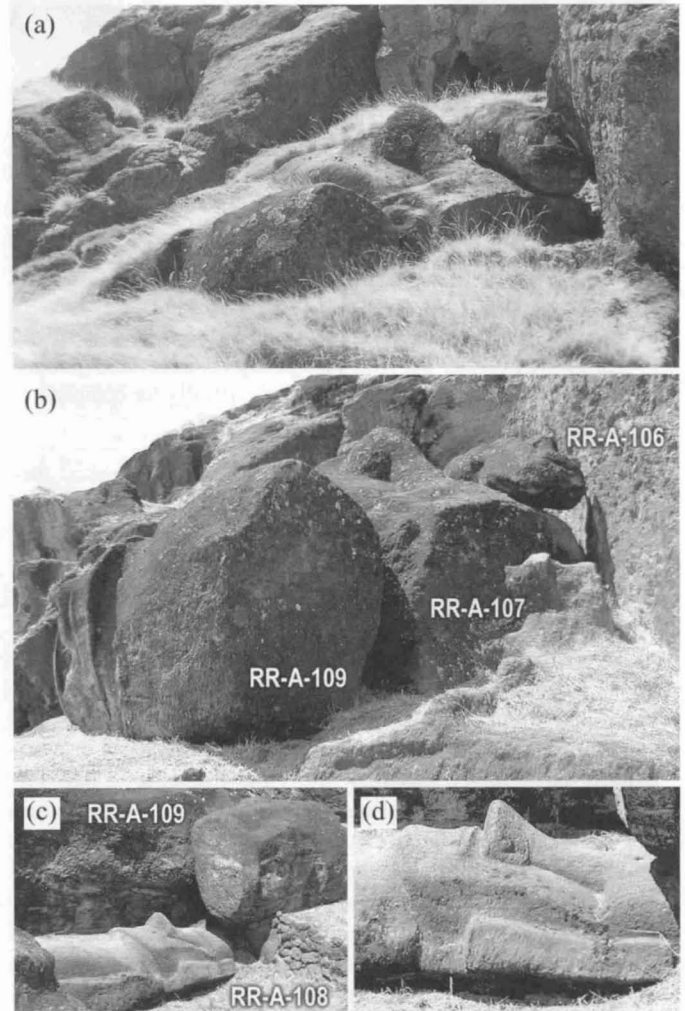


Figure 3. Ochre-colored *moai* cluster: a) Schjervén's photo showing statue RR-A-109 buried to a large extent (photo courtesy of the Kon-Tiki Museum); b) modern view, also c) and d) ochre-colored *moai* RR-A-108 with peculiar design of its nose wings (photos by the author, 2002).

This description corresponds to a quarry where the experimental *moai* was carved in 1955-56 (Figure 2.2). As one can see from the photo documenting the carving experiment (Figure 4a), only a base of image RR-A-077 was seen above the ground at that time; the neighboring *moai* RR-A-

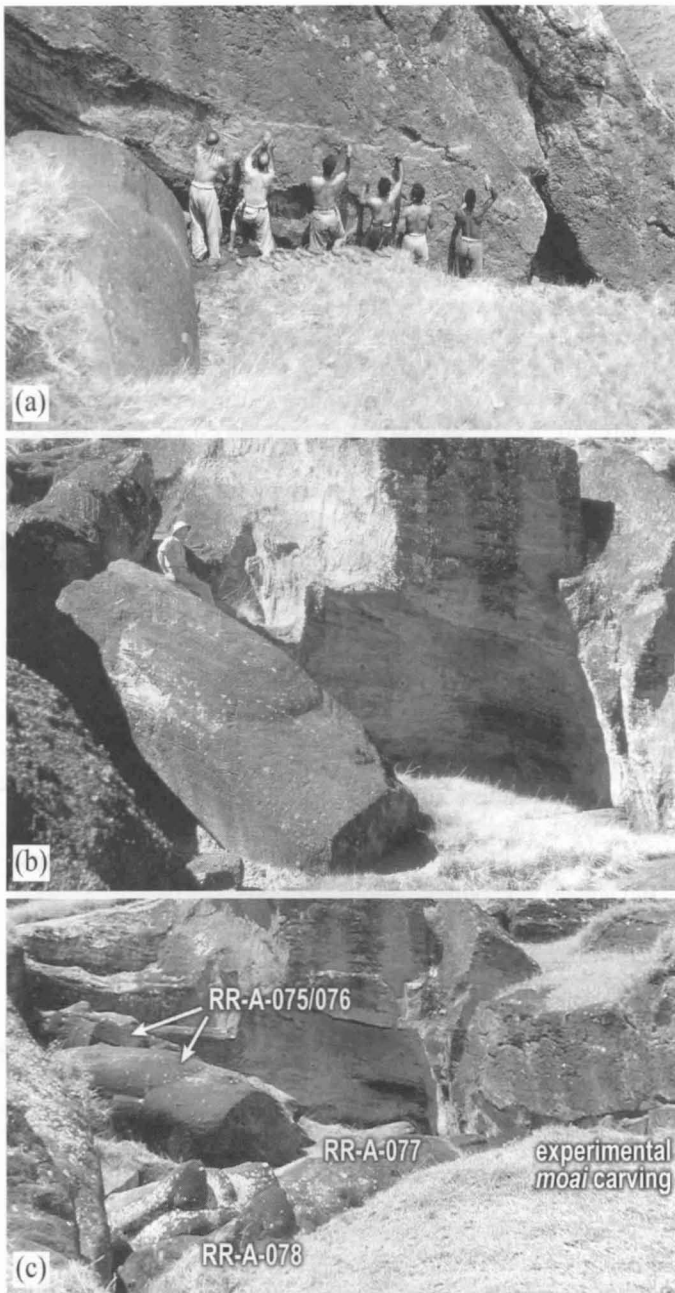


Figure 4. Experimental *moai* cluster: a) photo of statue carving experiment, showing the exposed base of image RR-A-077 (photo courtesy of the Kon-Tiki Museum); b) statue RR-A-075/076 in 1955-56, with its head lying on the quarry "steps" (photo courtesy of the Kon-Tiki Museum); c) modern view of the cluster with the collapsed image RR-A-075/076 and completely exposed statues RR-A-077, RR-A-078 (photo by the author, 2002).

078 (9.39 meters long according to Shepardson, 2007) was covered by debris. Nowadays, both statues are completely exposed (Figure 4c). Moreover, the post-1956 excavations explain the collapse of the statue RR-A-075/076 with an unusual cross-hatch design incised on its neck. This statue vividly illustrated the fact that the transport of the completed images from the upper quarries was performed not

only over smooth hills, but also over quarries (Skjølsvold 1961: 369, plate 58b); the image discussed was abandoned "in transit" after being accidentally broken at the neck (Figure 4b). However, removal of the debris to expose the statue RR-A-077 (or possibly the subsequent rains washing the soil away) destabilized the base part of RR-A-075/076, causing *moai* to collapse (Figure 4c).

In this way, the list of the excavated statues that remained at least partially exposed to the action of elements for almost half of a century will include *moai* 02-209-09 (red scoria pillar), RR-030, RR-049, RR-050, RR-061, RR-093, RR-265 (since 1955-56), and RR-A-077, RR-A-078, RR-A-108, RR-A-109 (since 1962), forming a considerable dataset for the studies of rock weathering, lichen growth, etc.

The photographic archive of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and East Pacific in 1955-56 is an outstanding image collection containing a huge amount of information about Easter Island, Rapanui people, and their unique cultural heritage. The large number of pictures (including several panoramic views) and predominantly superb photographic quality make this collection extremely important visual database, which is still able to yield many important results for Easter Island research.

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